

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

INTRODUCTION OF THE HOME-OWNERS MILITARY EQUITY ACT

HON. LINDA SMITH

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mrs. LINDA SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to introduce legislation correcting an inadvertent inequity in the Taxpayer Relief Act (TRA) we passed last year.

The TRA gives taxpayers who sell their principal residence a much-needed tax break. Prior to this, taxpayers were allowed a one-time exclusion on the profit from selling their home, but to take the exclusion you had to be at least 55 years old and live in the residence for 2 of the 5 years preceding the sale.

In 1997, we changed that. Under the TRA all taxpayers who sell their personal residence on or after May 7, 1997, are not taxed on the first \$250,000 of profit from the sale (\$500,000 for joint filers.) To qualify, there is a two-part test. The taxpayer must own the home for at least 2 of the 5 years preceding the sale, and he or she must also have lived in the home as their MAIN home for at least 2 years of the last 5 years. For most people, Mr. Speaker, all of this is fine. But there is a very important group of people we left out—military personnel on active duty away from home.

For these people—the men and women serving in our military who are assigned somewhat away from their home—qualifying for the new exemption can be difficult. I'm sure everyone would agree that our military personnel should be able to qualify for the same tax relief available to every other homeowner. Serving one's country away from home shouldn't be an impediment to qualifying for the exemption, but that's exactly what it is in many cases.

The measure I am introducing today amends the home ownership test in the Taxpayer Relief Act so that military personnel who are away on active duty can include that time spent serving our country when they calculate the number of years they lived in their primary residence. Under the bill's provisions, members of our Armed Forces will be considered to be using their house as their main residence for any period that they are away on extended active duty as long as they lived in the house as a principle residence before being ordered away.

Senator McCAIN has introduced a similar measure in the other body. I hope my colleagues here in the House will support this legislation and act swiftly to extend the same tax relief available to everyone else to the dedicated men and women in our Armed Forces.

IN HONOR OF THE LAND O' LAKES FISH AND GAME CLUB'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. JAY W. JOHNSON

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Land O' Lakes Fish and Game Club as they celebrate their 50th Anniversary. It is a remarkable milestone for a remarkable organization.

The Land O' Lakes Fish and Game Club is the oldest club of its kind in the state of Wisconsin. The club has been dedicated to the preservation of natural resources and wildlife from its inception. It is also dedicated to sponsoring educational projects in the public schools, as well as granting scholarships to teachers and students about to enter college.

For their commitment to the environment and Wisconsin's Northwoods, for their work to foster education and learning, for their public service, I want to officially recognize the Land O' Lakes Fish and Game Club on a half century of excellence.

I hope my colleagues will join me in congratulating the club on this extraordinary occasion, and wishing them another fifty years of success.

SPECIAL TRIBUTE HONORING
KELLY GEORGE, LEGRAND
SMITH SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

HON. NICK SMITH

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, it is with great respect for the outstanding record of excellence she has compiled in academics, leadership and community service, that I am proud to salute Kelly George, winner of the 1998 LeGrand Smith Scholarship. This award is made to young adults who have demonstrated that they are truly committed to playing important roles in our Nation's future.

As a winner of the LeGrand Smith Scholarship, Kelly is being honored for demonstrating that same generosity of spirit, intelligence, responsible citizenship, and capacity for human service that distinguished the late LeGrand Smith of Somerset, Michigan.

Kelly George is an exceptional student at Grand Ledge High School and possesses an impressive high school record. She has been involved with the National Honor Society. Kelly is involved with Drama and varsity tennis and track. Outside of school Kelly, has been involved with her church as a student leader and various other community activities.

In special tribute, therefore, I am proud to join with her many admirers in extending my highest praise and congratulations to Kelly George for her selection as a winner of a

LeGrand Smith Scholarship. This honor is also a testament to the parents, teachers, and others whose personal interest, strong support and active participation contributed to her success. To this remarkable young woman, I extend my most heartfelt good wishes for all her future endeavors.

SPECIAL INTERESTS

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, May 6, 1998 into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

THE POWER OF LOBBYISTS AND SPECIAL INTERESTS

One of the public's biggest criticisms of Congress is the power that lobbyists and special interests have over the legislative process. People see them as extremely powerful wheeler-dealers, able to manipulate the system for their own advantage, "buying" the votes of Members of Congress through extensive campaign contributions and other favors, and basically corrupting the political system.

CONCERNS

Certainly there are legitimate reasons for concern. Lobbying is constitutionally protected under the right to petition government, yet the powers of pressure groups are formidable. Their numbers are large and their resources vast. There are special interest groups for almost every cause, and lobbying is the third largest business in the nation's capital, behind only government and tourism.

Special interests gain access to Members through campaign contributions and determined lobbying, and often put pressure on Members to vote with them on their key votes. They also have a broader impact on the legislative process. Lobbyists regularly meet with leaders of Congress to help lay out the congressional agenda, and play a role in drafting legislation, often behind closed doors. Congress will sometimes debate bills that have little or no chance of passage, but which will appease key supporters.

Interest groups have also been criticized for sending out misleading information on the issues and running expensive "issue advocacy" attack ads against those who don't support their positions. They typically try to push through measures that benefit narrow rather than broader interests, and can make more difficult the compromise that is so essential to our system of government. There is no doubt that Members hear disproportionately from the well-off and the politically active groups—such as seniors, veterans, small business owners, and gun owners.

The power of special interests has long been recognized. More than 200 years ago, James Madison and the other founding fathers were particularly concerned about the power of "factions" in a democracy. And over the years, many congressional scandals have been related to powerful special interests and influence buying—from the Union

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Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

Pacific and Credit Mobilier stock scandals in the 1800s to more recently the Keating Five, Koreagate, and Abscam affairs.

BENEFITS

Yet despite these concerns I believe that there is still a legitimate and important role for lobbyists and special interests to play in our system of government, and that the public's perception of their influence is often exaggerated.

As the founding fathers recognized, special interests have their drawbacks but they also play an important role in informing legislators of the concerns of major segments of the population. Advocacy groups can inform Congress of the ways legislation impacts their members, provide extensive information on upcoming issues, and help focus the public's attention on important issues. This flow of information between government and the governed enhances what Jefferson called the "dialogue of democracy". I've found that the most effective lobbyists are those providing reliable information to Members and staff. Lobbyists understand that trust is their most precious asset.

Special interests don't somehow just represent "the bad guys". Almost every American is represented by them in some way and has benefited from their work. Lobbyists work, for example, for the continuation of the home mortgage interest deduction, for expanded medical research, for protecting our lakes and rivers, for improving interstate highways, for maintaining the student loan program, and for protecting religious freedom. Advocacy groups have helped pass legislation ranging from key civil rights protections to the deficit reduction package that has finally balanced the federal budget. Hoosiers benefit directly from the lobbyists representing the interests of the State of Indiana and local cities and towns in Washington.

It is true that lobbyists sometimes get through Congress measures that help only a few at the expense of the broader public. But the ease by which special interests can manipulate the system and push things through is exaggerated by the public. First, while Members do pay attention to what advocacy groups say, they also pay very close attention to the broad interests of their constituents. The bottom line for Members is that if they ignore the wishes of their constituents, they simply won't get re-elected. Second, special interest groups have proliferated so much in recent years that they often cancel each other out. For example, in the area of health policy one or two groups used to dominate, but now there are 750 health groups alone. Third, the founding fathers specifically set up our government with numerous obstacles for special interests trying to push through legislation. With its complex rules and maze of procedural hurdles, Congress was designed to slow things down and allow all sides a chance to be heard.

WHAT'S NEEDED

Special interest groups have a mixed impact on our political system. We shouldn't simply condemn them, but we do need to rein in some of the excesses and address legitimate concerns.

Various steps are needed. First, we need to pass campaign finance reform to curb the increasing reliance of lawmakers on money from special interests. Second, the House in recent years has basically banned gifts from lobbyists. Although some people are unhappy with the change, we need to keep tough gift restrictions in place. Third, Congress passed improved lobbying disclosure in 1995 to get a better handle on who is lobbying and what they are doing. That was important, but we need to closely monitor the law to make sure it is not easily avoided, as past reforms have

been. Fourth, we need to prohibit travel for Members and staff funded by groups with direct interest in legislation before Congress. Fifth, we need better disclosure of when lobbyists have played a major role in drafting legislation Congress is considering. Clearly the public has a right to know that. Sixth, because Members are much more likely to be contacted by special interest groups representing the better-off, we need to recognize that bias and make a special effort to ensure that all people in our society, including the less well-off, still have a voice in the decisions being made. Finally, all of us need to focus more on what's good for the country as a whole and less on what's good for each of us as individuals. At the end of the day, we are all Americans.

CONCLUSION

The proliferation of special interest groups may in some ways be worrisome, but it is an integral part of our system of government. As Madison noted, a free society nurtures politically active groups. They may not always act in the way that some of us might like and they may be prone to excesses, but they are still an important force in our system of representative democracy.

HONORING MADALYN AND MATTHEW LINSKEY

HON. NEWT GINGRICH

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mr. GINGRICH. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I submit to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the following essay, "Honoring Our Heroes," written by Madalyn Linksey, an eight year old constituent of mine who attends Kincaid Elementary. Madalyn speaks eloquently about the love and inspiration she and her family receive on a daily basis from her ten year old autistic brother, Matthew. I was privileged to be able to read Madalyn's essay at the April 25 Atlanta Investment Conference, the proceeds of which benefit the Friends of Autism. Through his enormous personal strength, Matthew reminds us all that with determination, courage, and love, we can overcome the most onerous of burdens to live a productive and fruitful life. I am proud to represent Matthew and Madalyn.

"HONORING OUR HEROES"

I would like to tell you about my real hero. He is my brother, Matthew Arthur Linskey, Jr. He is ten years old.

My brother was born with a disability called autism. He is mentally challenged and sees the world through a troubled and confused mind. He lives in a world that none of us can imagine. Somehow he finds a way to survive.

Adults and children sometimes stare and make fun of him because they don't understand his strange behavior. I'm sure that it hurts his feelings but he shows a lot of courage and tries to go on with his life.

He is very caring and compassionate to me when I am sad or angry about something even though I know he does not understand.

Matthew is persistent when trying to learn how to do simple tasks. He is very brave when he has to do things that his mind tells him to be afraid of.

This past summer after many years of swim lessons, Matthew competed in his first race. It was in our neighborhood on the summer swim team. We were swimming against another neighborhood team. Matthew swam

against boys his own age and finished last. He was so happy. Watching him made me feel so much joy in my heart. I was so proud that he tried his best.

Matthew has been a special gift to me and my family. He has taught me to be patient and understanding to people with special needs. He has also taught me never to give up trying to reach my goals. If he has the courage to do it, then I do too.

I admire and love Matthew Arthur Linksey, Jr. He is my brother, my best friend, and my "Real Life Hero" forever.

A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO JOSEPH HEYMAN ON HIS APPOINTMENT TO ATTEND THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT, NEW YORK

HON. PAUL E. GILLMOR

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mr. GILLMOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay special tribute to a truly outstanding young man from Ohio's Fifth Congressional District, Joseph L. Heyman. Joe has recently accepted his appointment to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

Joe, who is from Grand Rapids, Ohio, has distinguished himself as an outstanding student and a fine student-athlete while attending Ostego High School.

During his career at Ostego High School, Joe excelled academically by achieving a perfect grade point average of 4.00, which ranks him first in his class of 132 students. In addition, Joe has been active in the National Honor Society and was named a National Merit Scholar Semifinalist.

On the fields of competition, Joe has proven himself to be a talented and gifted student-athlete through his performances in both varsity football and varsity track. Joe has also been active in government and community service organizations. He has served on the Ostego High School Student Council, and is currently working on his Eagle Scout Award with the Boy Scouts of America.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that Joe will be very successful at West Point, and in all of his future endeavors. I would urge my colleagues to stand and join me in paying tribute to Joseph Heyman, and in wishing him all the best as he prepares for the United States Military Academy.

LENAWEE COUNTY POLICE OFFICERS MEMORIAL

HON. NICK SMITH

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 13, 1998

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, law enforcement officers work daily in communities across the Nation, assisting individuals in the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness;

Law enforcement officers are, most often, the first contact individuals have with their representatives of government, and they perform the duties and responsibilities of that important liaison role with wisdom and compassion;

Law enforcement officers are expected to perform duties above and beyond those of the